

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

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POUCHED TO ALL CANADIAN POSTS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: POL

SUBJ: ONTARIO ELECTION

REF: TORONTO 1126

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY SHARES REFTEL ESTIMATE THAT ON PRESENT FORM PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) PARTY LIKELY RETURN TO POWER IN ONTARIO PROVINCIAL ELECTION IN SEPTEMBER. END SUMMARY.

2. ALTHOUGH PC HAS LOST FOUR BY-ELECTIONS IN PAST TWO YEARS AND WAS WELL BEHIND LIBERAL PARTY IN JANUARY PUBLIC OPINION POLL (LIBERALS 42 PER CENT, PC 30 NDP 26), PC HAD NARROWED GAP IN MOST RECENT POLL TO THREE PERCENTAGE POINTS (LIBERALS 39, PC 36, NDP 25). FURTHERMORE, JULY LEADERSHIP PREFERENCE POLL GAVE PC PREMIER DAVIS COMMANDING LEAD AT 46 PERCENT OVER LIBERAL LEADER ROBERT NIXON WITH 32 PERCENT AND NDP LEADER STEPHEN LEWIS WITH 22. CLEARLY, DAVIS CALLED ELECTION IN BELIEF TIDE RUNNING IN HIS FAVOR AND THIS CONCLUSION SEEMS JUSTIFIED.

3. FACTORS IN TURN-AROUND UNDOUBTEDLY INCLUDE DAVIS GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO PROVIDE HOME-OWNER GRANTS, FIVE PERCENT TAX REBATE ON NEW CAR SALES, SALES TAX REDUCTION AND, ESPECIALLY, OIL AND GAS PRICE FREEZE. DAVIS APPEARS FEEL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LATTER MEASURE, REPRESENTING DIRECT PROVINCIAL CHALLENGE TO

FEDERAL ENERGY POLICY, STRUCK MOST RESPONSIVE CHORD AMONG VOTERS. ACCORDINGLY, HE IS TARGETTING HIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (IN PROCESS SEEKING TAR PROVINCIAL LIBERALS WITH FEDERAL LIBERAL BRUSH) AS RESPONSIBLE FOR INFLATION, UN-EMPLOYMENT AND AN ENERGY POLICY WHICH "ENRICHES CERTAIN GOVERNMENTS (E.G. ALBERTA) AT THE EXPENSE OF ONTARIO INDUSTRY AND ONTARIO CONSUMERS."

4. LIBERAL LEADER NIXON HAS BRANDED ABOVE-MENTIONED DAVIS GOVERNMENT MEASURES "CYNICAL ATTEMPTS BUY VOTES" AND USE OF "PUBLIC TREASURY FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES" AND HAS BILLED INTEGRITY IN GOVERNMENT AS MAJOR CAMPAIGN ISSUE. SENSITIVE TO LINKAGE BY DAVIS OF FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LIBERAL PARTIES (WHOM DAVIS LABELLED "KISSING COUSINS"), NIXON HAS ESPOUSED NEGOTIATION RATHER THAN DAVIS-STYLE CONFRONTATION IN PROVINCIAL-FEDERAL RELATIONS. HIS DEFENSIVE TONE UNDERSTANDABLE: PC VICTORY IN SEPTEMBER WOULD MAKE NIXON (WHOSE FATHER HARRY WAS LAST ONTARIO LIBERAL PREMIER) THREE-TIME LOSER AND LIKELY COST HIM PARTY LEADERSHIP.

5. NDP HOPES INCREASE ITS HOLDINGS BY TARGETTING DIRECTLY ON PC RATHER THAN LIBERALS (AS IT DID TO ITS DETRIMENT IN 1971), APPARENTLY ASSUMING LIBERALS WILL FALL OF OWN PLUS FEDERAL WEIGHT. NDP PRESUMABLY ALSO HOPES FACT ONTARIO FAVORITE SONE ED BROADBENT WON NDP NATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN JULY WILL LEND SOME LUSTRE TO THEIR CAMPAIGN.

6. IN SUM, WORST CASE FOR PC NOW WOULD APPEAR BE GAIN OF SEVERAL SEATS BY NDP WITH LIBERALS HOLDING THEIR OWN. THIS WOULD STILL LEAVE UNBROKEN PC 32-YEAR RECORD DOMINANCE IN ONTARIO GOVERNMENT.
PORTER

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